Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-10 (Canceled).

11. (Previously Presented) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

a shutter key for producing an operation signal when depressed; and

a main control unit for directly receiving the operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, for sensing an initial change to an on state in the operation signal and providing an instruction to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object when the on state is sensed once, and for determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal is sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

12. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal, produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals

of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.

13. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on state of the received second operation signal, and delivering information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal to the main control unit.

14. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object, and for processing data on the image of the object picked up by the image pickup element.

15. (Previously Presented) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

a shutter key for producing an operation signal when depressed;

a main control unit for directly receiving the operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, for sensing an initial change to an on state of the operation signal by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time and providing an instruction to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object when the on state is sensed once, and for determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal is sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

16. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal, produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.

17. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on

state of the received second operation signal, and delivering information on the sensed on state of the received second operation signal to the main control unit.

18. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object, and for processing data on the image of the object picked up by the image pickup element.

Claims 19-20 (Canceled).

21. (Previously Presented) An image pickup method comprising:

directly receiving an operation signal produced by depression of a shutter key;

sensing an initial change to an on state in the operation signal, and then instructing an image pickup element to pick up an image of an object when the on state is sensed once; and

determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal is sensed successively a

predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

22. (Previously Presented) An image pickup method comprising:

directly receiving an operation signal produced by depression of a shutter key;

sensing an initial change to an on state of the operation signal by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time, and then instructing an image pickup element to start to pick up an image of an object when the on state of the operation signal is sensed once; and

determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal is sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

Claims 23-29 (Canceled).